

PE2154/A: Ensure planning consideration for equestrian accessibility

Scottish Government written submission, 2 May 2025

Q. Does the Scottish Government consider the specific ask of the petition to be practical or achievable? If not, please explain why.

The Scottish Government considers that existing national planning policies set out in National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) do not need to be updated to address the matters raised in the petition.

There is a statutory structure for making decisions on planning applications. The Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 requires that planning applications are determined in accordance with the statutory development plan, unless material planning considerations justify a departure from that plan. The development plan consists of NPF4 and the relevant local development plan covering the area in question. NPF4 contains a comprehensive set of national planning policies, which should be read as a whole.

NPF4 Policy 20 (Blue and green infrastructure) sets out to protect and enhance blue and green infrastructure and networks, so that communities benefit from accessible and high quality green spaces. It expects local development plans (LDPs) to identify and protect green infrastructure assets and networks, enhance and expand existing provision. It also sets out that LDPs should safeguard access rights and core paths and encourage new and enhanced opportunities for access linked to wider networks.

The policy states that development proposals that result in fragmentation or net loss of existing blue and green infrastructure will only be supported (by that policy) where it can be demonstrated that the proposal would not result in or exacerbate a deficit in blue or green infrastructure provision and the overall integrity of the network would be maintained. The policy also provides support in principle to development proposals for, or incorporating, new or enhanced green infrastructure.

NPF4 Policy 14 (Design, quality and place) promotes and facilitates well-designed development that makes sustainable places by taking a design-led approach and applying the Place Principle. It expects development proposals to be consistent with the 'six qualities of successful places', which include 'healthy' (including designing for healthy and active lifestyles), 'pleasant' and 'connected' (including designing for active travel and connectivity).

NPF4 Policy 13 (Sustainable transport) sets out expectations for development proposals to be designed to incorporate traffic safety measures, and to consider the transport needs of users.

Planning applications for certain proposed developments, including applications for planning permission for fifty or more houses, have to be accompanied by a design and access statement. These statements should set out how the context of the development has been appraised and how policies relating to design in the development plan have been addressed.

Q. Is there any further information the Scottish Government wish to bring to the Committee's attention, which would assist it in considering this petition?

In response to the provisions of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 (the 2003 Act), all Local Authorities and National Park Authorities have a statutory duty to uphold access rights and as such ensure that access provisions are barrier free to enable all types of responsible access use, be that walking, wheeling a pram, buggy or wheelchair, scootering, cycling or riding a horse in places where access rights apply. In an urban context this might include green spaces, parks, woods, paths (both constructed or desire lines), canal tow paths etc. It would also apply to any core paths shown on the access authority core paths plan. Any developer would need to ensure that access rights are un-obstructed in relation to any new path/space provision; and in relation to any existing core paths these are protected and if a developer wants to divert or remove a core path that is a matter for the access authority (section 20A – 20D of the 2003 Act). Core path planning will typically take place either alongside or at least in full consideration of any local authority or national park authority local development plans/ local place plans and vice versa; and consider all types of access including equestrian.

Demand or need for specific horse-related infrastructure in urban developments tends to be rare, in comparison, for example with cycling. Nevertheless, we would expect it to be considered at a local level to ensure suitable provision appropriate to location and use. This might consider opportunities for design features such as bridges with high railings, signage for shared use, tie-up points, dismount blocks, wider path verges for riding on, etc.

Planning policy already takes account of access rights, and therefore the consideration of equestrian use and requirements as appropriate.

Directorate for Planning, Architecture and Regeneration